

Testimony of Kadisha Coates
Parent, Achievement First Bridgeport Academy
Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee
February 16, 2016

Good evening Chairman Walker, Chairwoman Bye, and the members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kadisha Coates. I am a former Bridgeport Board of Education member, and most importantly a parent of two children currently attending Achievement First Bridgeport Academy. I am here today to speak to you as a parent and Bridgeport resident who has experienced many sides of Bridgeport's educational system.

As a parent, I want to express to you the dire educational crisis happening in our inner city communities. My children were very lucky to have been selected to attend Achievement First Bridgeport Academy in a lottery. I am impressed with the school's ability to instill a desire to learn that seems innate in nature. Both of my school-aged children have always had a love for mathematics. Recently my daughter told me that her favorite teacher is Mrs. Kris (her math teacher). I asked why, expecting the typical answer. However, my eight year-old daughter said, "because she believes in us, she believes that we can do our work even if it's hard". It doesn't matter who you are or the station in life you have entered. You will always need someone to believe in you. The holistic approach to learning can be incredibly simple and is a mainstay in Achievement First Bridgeport Academy.

As a Bridgeport resident, I want to impress upon you the dramatic improvement in all aspects of daily living which could be afforded by fair and equitable education to those who need it the most. All of Connecticut's public schools and the children that attend them need and deserve equal treatment by the state. With that said, Connecticut's public charter schools currently receive \$4,000 less in annual government funding than district schools. This inequity in funding is insufficient to say the very least.

As a proud public charter school parent and former member of the Bridgeport Board of Education, I'm calling on the state's lawmakers to attack the elephant in the room before it continues to harm our children. Please make every attempt to resolve the funding gap that public charter schools receive, and consider a new approach for funding all of the state's public schools. Children should not be penalized because of their geographic location or choice of educational institutions.

AF Bridgeport Academy has made incredible accomplishments with some of our state's highest-need children. In the recent SBAC scores, as a district, AF Bridgeport Academy ranked #3 in Math performance and #4 in English Language Arts performance among English Language Learner students. Although we still have more progress to make, these test results are a testament to the great teaching that occurs in public charter schools.

I would like to thank you for your consideration of my testimony. I urge you to develop a long-term solution that provides a high-quality, fair and equitable education to all Connecticut students.